

By Mae Miller

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MOUNTAIN BIKING, BOTTLE TREES, AND BLACK-EYED PEAS:

Annette Saunooke Clapsaddle's Creative Nonfiction and Other Writings

[ANNETTE SAUNOOKE CLAPSADDLE] PROVIDES A KIND OF BLUEPRINT OR MAP OF HER ARTISTIC JOURNEY THROUGH THE CREATIVE NONFICTION ESSAYS AND OTHER ARTICLES PUBLISHED ON HER WEBSITE AND ACROSS A VARIETY OF OTHER MEDIA.

Annette Saunooke Clapsaddle's award-winning novel *Even as We Breathe* has received wide acclaim and a great deal of attention from well-regarded regional publications such as *Our State* and *The Bitter Southerner* in addition to national media sources such as National Public Radio and *Publishers Weekly*. Like many writers, Clapsaddle has walked a long path to reach this kind of recognition of her talents. But unlike many writers, she provides a kind of blueprint or map of her artistic journey through the creative nonfiction essays and other articles published on her website and across a variety of other media.

As a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Clapsaddle embraces her many roles: as a (former) teacher at Swain County High School, as mentor/teacher to other writers, and as ambassador of cultural knowledge to a larger public. She is, first, Cherokee, part of a culture that teaches service to community over service to self. In her essays and articles, Clapsaddle explores the themes that contribute to her unique identity as Cherokee teacher, writer, and community leader.

Among her many roles, teaching is clearly near and dear to Clapsaddle's heart. She recognizes that her writing provides something special for her students, especially her Native

students. In an interview with NPR, Clapsaddle became emotional talking about why she felt the impetus to write. She states, "For me, that's it. That's what I set out to do is to give my students a story."¹ Colby Taylor, now a freshman in the Honors College at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, explains that until he read her book, he had not read about people "like us." Clapsaddle's writing "immersed" him "in such specific details of Cherokee culture." While Taylor had read and appreciated authors such as Robert T. Kiyosaki, Ta-Nehisi Coates, and Sherman Alexie, the stories did not connect with his Cherokee world.

MAE MILLER CLAXTON teaches classes in Southern, Appalachian, and Native American literature at Western Carolina University. She has edited *Conversations with Dorothy Allison* (University Press of Mississippi, 2012) and *Conversations with Ron Rash*, co-edited with Rain Newcomb (University Press of Mississippi, 2017). Along with co-editor George Frizzell, she published a collection of Horace

Kephart's writings (University of Tennessee Press, 2020). Articles have appeared in *Mississippi Quarterly*, *South Atlantic Review*, and *Southern Quarterly*, among others. She was the Hunter Scholar for 2012–2013, developing a number of projects from the Kephart collection in Hunter Library at WCU. She served as president of the Eudora Welty Society from 2010–2012.